

MY CALL TO THE COAST

by Ashley Hall

AS THE GUT-WRENCHING NARRATIVE of the BP oil spew began to unfold, my face got redder each day—with anger, frustration, sorrow, helplessness. I am an Alabama native and a lifelong resident of the Deep South. The beaches of my childhood were being soiled. I watched every news report, hoping I could plug the spill with my vigilance.

Eventually, acceptance set in. The recovery is going to take a long time. And not a single person on the planet can tell us what the fallout will be for the coasts of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

Like so many of you, I felt a pull to do something. Anything. It hit me that what I could do was spend a little bit of time and discover firsthand what was happening in the Gulf Coast communities that meant the most to me.

Specifically, I decided to find out how this oil—and, in some places, the mere threat of oil—has already impacted the traditional seafood communities of eastern Mississippi, Alabama, and the western panhandle of Florida. I hit the road for two weeks in late June, drove east from Biloxi to Apalachicola, and posted dispatches on my personal travel blog (www.thirdcoastbyways.com).

I also collected interviews and stories for the SF A's oral history project. Amy Evans Streeter was incredibly supportive of my project, and I thank her heartily. Please know that there are many, many communities in dire straits down that way. The places I visited are not necessarily worse off than anywhere else along the Gulf. But this is the Coast I knew, and the Coast that I wanted to document.

Ashley Hall is a freelance writer, wine professional, former newspaperwoman, and food enthusiast. A native of Birmingham, Alabama, she is now a loyal resident of Atlanta, Georgia.

RIGHT: Miss Martha, a shrimp boat owned by Buddy Ward and Sons Seafood in Apalachicola, Florida. The boat is named for co-owner Tommy Ward's mother, Martha Pearl Wood.

